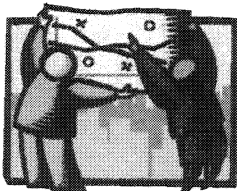


Chapter 2: Action Planning



This chapter takes you through the steps for action planning.

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Chapter 2 *Action Planning*

Module 1: Conducting Listening Sessions

Step Up and Step Out to begin Listening Sessions!

Listening sessions are the first step in action planning.



It is fairly easy to get caught up in the dream...the thought of creating healthy changes...and begin “doing” before listening and planning, but dreams can turn to frustration if the coalition does not have a plan that produces results. Investing time upfront in action planning will pay off time and time again. A coalition without results will not attract people and resources.

This chapter guides the core group of coalition organizers through action planning steps. If it isn’t done exactly as suggested, that’s okay! You’ll have a place to start and develop as you go along!



It is helpful to have an initiative coordinator and coalition leader(s) identified at this point to help facilitate the process.



What is a listening session?

Listening sessions are meetings for collecting ideas and comments for future planning. They are a fun and motivating way to involve the whole community from the very beginning! Advantages include:

- ♥ An occasion to announce the formation of the coalition and create future interest for involvement...the coalition’s marketing kickoff
- ♥ A unique opportunity to hear from the community...to identify interests as well as past and current concerns
- ♥ A format to inspire creative discussions and ideas
- ♥ Easy to understand and realistic results for identifying future goals
- ♥ Minimal costs



Listening sessions are not designed to solve problems—just gather facts. There may be negative thoughts or concerns expressed during a session, and that's okay. It is *good* to get concerns out in the open for *later* discussion.

Results will be positive when listening session facilitators:

- ♥ acknowledge concerns
- ♥ record negative thoughts
- ♥ announce that concerns will be addressed before the next meeting
- ♥ move on, to keep everyone on task

Note: Don't forget to address concerns as promised, and follow-up with a phone call or letter to those who made the comment.

Other applications for listening sessions

The listening session is identified as the first step in the action planning stage of a community initiative, but there will be other times throughout the life of the coalition you will find it helpful. Keep the following times in mind:

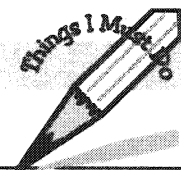
- ♥ When there is a gap in understanding between community members or among community leaders
- ♥ When a coalition is looking for new ideas
- ♥ When a coalition is attempting to gain community support for the initiative
- ♥ When a coalition is evaluating progress

Conducting the listening session

The core coalition group plans for the listening session.

1. Determine questions to ask

- ♥ Pre-determine the set of questions a facilitator will ask about how the initiative should look or be developed in the community.
- ♥ Plan for discussion of community wants, needs, resources, and concerns. The questions given in the listening session role-play at the end of this module are a good place to begin if you are not sure how to determine questions.

- 
1. Determine questions
 2. Identify who should attend
 3. Set dates and times
 4. Determine location(s)
 5. Determine how to invite participants
 6. Plan how to conduct the meeting
 7. Conduct the meeting
 8. Follow-up

2. Identify who should attend

- ♥ The core coalition building group
- ♥ Participants with common interests in the community initiative
- ♥ Community leaders
- ♥ Individuals/groups opposed to the initiative



3. Set the dates and times

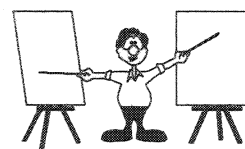
- ♥ Determine how many sessions to conduct
 - As many as needed for determining community opinion.
 - Enough sessions so that each group can be limited to 10-30 participants. It is hard to facilitate discussion and allow enough time for everyone to speak with more people than that.
- ♥ Conduct sessions at different times and days to reach the greatest number of community members.
- ♥ Limit the listening session to no more than 1 ½ hours. Longer sessions will fragment discussion and drain the energy levels of the participants. It isn't ideal, but if a listening session can't end within the time allotted, reschedule a follow-up meeting.

4. Determine location(s)

- ♥ Find a room large enough to accommodate the number of people you expect and in a convenient location.
- ♥ Make sure the room allows space to set up flip charts, markers, and comfortable chairs!

5. Determine how to invite participants

- ♥ Put announcements in newsletters/newspapers, call, e-mail, and send post-cards.
- ♥ Place posters on public bulletin boards such as in the library or supermarket.



6. Plan how to conduct the session

- ♥ Designate a session facilitator... an individual with good listening, mediating, negotiating, and cheerleading skills, who will respect all points of view, include everyone, maintain a neutral position and refocus the group if they get off track.
- ♥ Designate a person to record ideas and concerns on a flipchart...someone who writes clearly and large enough so that participants can read what is written.

Note: Flip charts are great for recording feedback during the meeting. They allow everyone to review responses, and help to combine and summarize information if several different listening sessions are conducted.

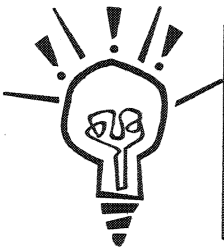
- ♥ In addition to recording on the flipchart, arrange for another person to take notes. Comments are often shortened when recorded on a flipchart, and taking notes will allow for a little more detail. There is a worksheet at the end of this module that may be helpful for note taking.
- ♥ Designate an individual to keep track of time. This person will clarify the amount of time to be spent on each question and how the facilitator wants to be informed of time in advance of the session.

7. Conduct the meeting

- ♥ Begin and end at the times specified.
- ♥ Use brainstorming rules (a round robin with each person in the room having the opportunity to contribute thoughts) with each group to maximize creativity and cultivate as many ideas, opinions, and options as possible.
- ♥ State up front that money (or how to finance ideas) is not to be discussed in the listening sessions. Money will need to be addressed at some point, but a concern for it now prompts too much problem-solving discussion, limiting ideas.

8. Follow-up

- ♥ Organize the information received during the session(s).
Note: You will be using information from the listening session to plan actions for your initiative so it will be important to make the information easy to access.
- ♥ Follow-up with participants to explain how information will be used. Let them know how important their feedback is, and invite them to join the coalition.



Module Tip:

Listening sessions provide a means to gather ideas from all segments of the community. Adjust the number you hold, the times they are held, and the location as needed to reach as many people as possible.

FAQs:

- ❑ **Question:** How do you keep people on track with the questions being asked?
Answer: Acknowledge the importance of all questions or concerns that are “off the subject.” Use another page on your flip chart to record that question or concern. Either return to the question later in the discussion or let the individual know you will follow up with them at the end of the meeting. Consider all viewpoints as valuable information. There will be opportunities to discuss differences and problem-solve at a later time.
- ❑ **Question:** How do you begin to organize the information received?
Answer: The information will be organized according to the question asked. You may want to also divide the information by component, i.e., physical activity, healthy food choices, school curriculum, school meals or coalition building. The ideas and concerns will be the first things the new coalition will address and use to plan goals.
- ❑ **Question:** After the listening session, what actions need to be taken?
Answer: Send all participants a summary of the session. Send a thank you note as appropriate, and explain how ideas will be used in the planning.

Module Glossary:

Listening Session: A meeting for collecting ideas and comments for future planning, problem solving, and marketing.



A Practice Listening Session-Role Play

The following exercise gives you an opportunity to role-play a listening session for a community-based initiative. A community objective, session questions, and even a description of the listening session participants are provided for you below.

Role-play tips:

The role-play is designed to include as many as 30 people, but it can be adjusted for a smaller number by making fewer “personalities” available. Up to 27 people can assume the role of a personality found on the following pages. In addition, people will need to choose to play the roles of facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. It will be helpful to make a copy of the following personality descriptions and cut them into strips for people to draw at random.

Time required for role-play:

The amount of time required by the role-play can be controlled by the length of time and number of responses allowed for the questions asked. A maximum of 1½ hour is suggested—the time limit recommended for a “real” session.

Role-play directions:

Once the players are determined, use the following instructions:

1. The facilitator leads a review of the community objective provided below.
2. The facilitator asks the session questions in the order listed. Players should answer the questions in the “personality role” they are playing.
Comments/answers are to be recorded on the flip chart by the recorder. You may wish to plan for a second recorder to take notes on paper.
3. Allow each player to describe the “role” they played following discussion of all of the questions. (This can lead to a discussion on how to “deal” with personalities!)
4. Discuss the “lessons learned”—the problems identified. It is a good idea to problem-solve these for practice prior to the “real” listening session.

Role-play objective:

Your community wants to develop an initiative to influence the eating behaviors and physical activity patterns of children in the community. This initiative will be sponsored and managed by the elementary school, working collaboratively with the County Extension Department and the Local Health Department.

Role-play Session Questions:

- If money were no object, how would you like this initiative to look in your community?
- What experiences have you or this community had related to the concern? What were the results?
- What resources does this community have that could assist this initiative? Think about people, existing programs, policies, etc., not just money.
- Who do you expect to oppose this initiative? What will be the reason for their opposition?
- What advice can you give us?

Role-play Participants:

The following characters will participate in your listening session. A description of each personality follows the list below. As you role-play this exercise, please stay in “character.” At the end of the exercise, you will have the opportunity to explain your personality's position.



The Coalition Members: Facilitator Time Keeper Recorder

The Community Personalities:

PTA President	Local Family Physician	Minister
Local Rancher	High School Students (2)	Newspaper Editor
County Extension Agent	Drug Free Coalition Director	Football Coach
Parents (2)	Senior Citizen	Grocer
City Librarian	School Food Service Directors (2)	Business Owner
School Nurse	Local Health Department Director	Teachers (3)
Cancer Society Volunteer	Local Environmental Activist	
Local Fast Food Operator	Community College Instructor	

Personality Descriptions:

Copy pages with descriptions of personalities that can then be cut in strips describing each role-play person. This allows players to draw a “personality” and have the description of only the player they will role-play. The exercise is more of a learning experience if the players do not know each other's personality.

You are the PTA president—You are one of those people who are involved in everything at the school. You are very proud of all the events you have in place and you are concerned about how this initiative might impact what you do, i.e., candy sales, special parties, fun nights, etc.

You are a local rancher—You raise both hogs and cattle. You are very concerned that this initiative will teach kids to be vegetarian and will eliminate meat from the cafeteria menu. You have had one heart attack, so you support nutrition education and physical activity, as long as it doesn't restrict meat intake.

You are the County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Science —You are very excited about this initiative and you have already thought of ways you and your colleagues can support it. You want to integrate the USDA Team Nutrition Program into this initiative and help in any way you can.

You are the parent of two elementary school students—You are very excited about this initiative because you are concerned about the school meals. You do not want your children receiving any pre-prepared foods and you think this initiative could be used to force the school food service to go to “scratch cooking” for student meals.

You are the parent of two elementary school students—You are very excited about this initiative because you know that your students are not receiving the practical nutrition information and experiences that you feel they need. As a single parent, you work two jobs, and you don't have time to cook with your kids or teach them nutrition. You would like to see before and after school “latch-key care” that is physical activity based and includes nutritious snacks for the kids.

You are the local librarian—You are excited about the initiative and you are anxious to find out how you can support it. You are working on your budget for next year and are hoping to obtain a list of books that are recommended so that they can be added to the local library as a way to support the initiative.

You are the school nurse—You are here to support the initiative because you see a large number of students who are sick or unable to concentrate because they haven't eaten breakfast or have just eaten a donut on the way to school. You hope the initiative will increase support for a school breakfast program and you also want to see physical education expanded, even if it means a longer school day.

You are a volunteer for the American Cancer Society (ACS)—You know that comprehensive school health education is a priority of the ACS and you want to be sure that this initiative has the same philosophy. You also want to be sure that cancer prevention is a part of the initiative.

You are a local fast food operator—You are supportive of the initiative, but you are concerned that students will be taught not to frequent your restaurant. You don't know much about low-fat eating or 5 A Day, but you know these ideas are part of the initiative. You are here to learn and to figure out how this initiative will impact your business.

You are the town's family physician—You are here to support health education in schools. You see too many people with heart disease and cancer. You have noticed that more and more of your patients are overweight, including the children. You are an avid runner and you are interested in increased physical activity and nutrition training for kids.

You are a high school student—You are concerned that this initiative will take the pizza, burgers, fries, and shakes out of the high school cafeteria.

You are a high school student—As an athlete, you are excited about the initiative. You hope it teaches kids good stretching, flexibility, and strength building exercises so that they will be less likely to be injured in high school sports. You also hope it will have a positive impact on the school meals and vending/concession options so that a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as low-fat snacks, are made available to students.

You are the director of the local drug free coalition—You are concerned that people who have been working with you on your coalition will leave and join the coalition supporting this new initiative. You sincerely believe that drug use, not nutrition and physical activity, is the major problem among youth in your community, so you aren't convinced that this initiative is necessary. You see it as a way to get more money for your own agenda, however.

You are a senior citizen—You are supportive of this initiative because you understand that risky behaviors are learned in childhood. You would like to support the initiative in any way you can, including volunteering in the classrooms and assisting with intergenerational activities.

You are the elementary school food service director—You have been the elementary school food service director for 15 years, and you are having real difficulty understanding all the new rules and regulations from USDA. You are excited about the possibility of some help from this initiative. You would also like to know how to work more with the teachers.

You are the secondary school food service director—You are concerned that this initiative will require changes that will be unacceptable to students. If they don't like what is served, they will stop eating in the cafeteria and your revenues will decrease. The Superintendent is adamant that school food service must make money.

You are the local health department director—You are excited about the idea of the initiative but worried about how much of your time it is going to take.

You are a local environmental activist—You are here to support adoption of a vegetarian menu in the schools. You are concerned about feedlot runoff, corporate hog farming, and carcinogens in the food supply. You support the purchase of locally grown, organically raised foods for school meals. You want to know what will be taught in the nutrition curriculum.

You are an instructor at the local community college—You teach in the health and physical education programs and you are looking for opportunities for your students. You support the initiative because you see a lot of very sedentary students with poor dietary habits when they get to college.

You are a minister—You belong to a conservative denomination. You are very concerned about any health education in schools. You believe that health education, regardless of topic, is the responsibility of parents.

You are the newspaper editor—You are here to “get the story.” You know that health education is controversial in your community. At the same time, you are concerned about the issues of poor dietary habits and physical activity. You are hoping your newspaper can support the initiative.

You are the high school football coach—What is this about non-competitive physical activity? Your school has “taken state” for the past three years. Football has put the school on the map! We need to teach kids to be more competitive, not less. You are also concerned about possible changes in vending because all of the snack and pop machine revenues are used to buy uniforms and equipment for your program.

You are a local grocer—You are at this meeting to see how your grocery store can be used as a learning laboratory for students. You provide some of the fresh produce for the school food service, so you are anxious to hear how this relationship might be impacted by the initiative.

You are a local business owner—You are here to learn more about the initiative and then you will make up your mind about whether or not you support it. Your company sponsors some community events, with a focus on kids, so this may be another opportunity to give to the community.

You are an elementary P.E. teacher—You are excited about this initiative because you hope it will influence the school district to adopt more frequent physical education classes. You are concerned about the limited amount of time the kids have in class and how that impacts their overall health.

You are an elementary P.E. teacher—You are not supportive of the initiative because you have heard that classroom teachers in some of the existing school health initiative schools are using physical activity to teach math, reading, science and social studies. You are afraid your job will be eliminated.

You are an elementary classroom teacher—You are excited about the initiative because you realize how important health education, especially nutrition and physical activity, are to the students' well being. You are concerned about your personal lack of current knowledge in these areas as well as the amount of time the initiative will take.

Worksheet

1. If money were no object, how would you like this initiative to look in your community?

2. What experiences have you or this community had related to the concern being addressed? What were the results?

3. What resources does this community have that could assist this initiative? Think about people, existing programs, policies, etc., not just money.

4. Who do you expect to oppose this initiative? What will be the reason for their opposition?

5. What advice can you give us?

Lessons learned from the role-play:

Sample invitation to the listening session

An Invitation to Step Up and Step Out

Come join us to make a difference for kids!

Children are at risk for health problems resulting from lack of physical activity and obesity.

We can help reverse unhealthy trends with fun, low cost ideas to create healthy choices in our community!

Your thoughts and ideas are important! Please join us:

Location _____

Time _____

The discussion won't last any longer than 90 minutes and attendance does not mean you are volunteering anything other than your thoughts during that time.

Please invite others to join you. For additional information, contact:

